

DOCTOR WEBB'S THEOLOGY OF INFANT SALVATION.

By E. C. Gordon.

The chief object of this book is to show that the so-called Calvinistic system of theology meets the issues presented by the question concerning the salvation of dead infants "squarely and fully, Scripturally and intelligently," and "does fairly and fully give a biblical, rational and theological basis for the doctrine of the salvation of all dead infants, idiots and incapables, living and dying in moral incompetency" (Preface).

Doctor Webb's defense of Calvinism at this critical point is exceedingly able, and deserves the serious attention of all who think on these profound and difficult subjects. It occupies 250 of the 330 pages of the book, and is largely taken up in showing that other theological systems do not so scripturally and reasonably meet the exigencies of this problem, the salvation of incapables, as does the Calvinistic. This system admits with the Scriptures the sinfulness of these incapables, their need of salvation, of atonement, regeneration, justification, sanctification and adoption; and finds a basis for all in the unconditional election of God, in the efficiency and sufficiency of the atonement, in the work of the omnipotent Spirit of God, in the passivity of the soul in regeneration.

But Dr. Webb is astute enough to know that his discussion, if it is to meet the popular demand, must not only open a door through which these incapables may pass from guilt to justification, from depravity to holiness, from the kingdom of Satan into the kingdom of God; it must also show, or at least attempt to show, that, as a matter of fact, they do make the passage; that they are all the objects of God's electing love, the subjects of his regenerating, justifying and sanctifying grace. Accordingly, after a statement of the general belief as to the salvation of this class, which, in brief, we shall agree to call "incapables," in a single chapter of 33 pages he presents the Scripture data upon which our faith as to their salvation may rest.

On page 11 he tells us that there are at least a thousand verses in the Bible in which childhood in some way is referred to; that any student who examines them "will be surprised and disappointed to find that not a single text explicitly and dogmatically tells us what is the fate of infants dying in infancy." The same is true of other classes among persons incapable of being outwardly called by the ministry of the word. Dr. Webb tells us that the student "will rise from his study wishing that the Scriptures were more explicit, but still feeling that the very most which he has derived by honest grammar and exegesis is suggestion hint, hope; and that he is at last thrown back upon theology, and compelled to settle the matter by inference." He then quotes our Confession of Faith to show that our faith may rest solidly on what "by good and necessary consequence may be deduced from Scripture.

Hence he makes attempt to remove the unhappiness consequent on the discovery that God nowhere explicitly asserts his intention to save all these incapables, by showing that we may certainly infer from

certain Scriptures that he does so intend.

No serious minded Calvinist can fail at times to be troubled because he is restrained by God's word from being a universalist. Every such Calvinist will admit that God can save all these incapables if he chooses to do so; moreover, he would hail with delight, in the admitted absence of explicit Scripture proof, any cogent inferential proof which any theologian could present.

The trouble at this point is that we all eagerly desire to be assured that all these incapables are saved; and we eagerly welcome any plausible argument that proposes to sustain that desire. And so, like the sick folk, who read about the wonderful cures of the quack medicines and neglect to inquire about the failures, we draw inferences from the few Scriptures which apparently sustain our desire and neglect those which apparently destroy it. As a simple matter of fact, which every student can verify for himself, nearly everything which the Scriptures have to say about incapables goes to show that their fate is bound up with the fate of their parents. If their parents are believing and covenant-keepers, it is implied, more or less clearly, that their children, capable and incapable, are saved, except as those who are capable refuse to accept the covenant for themselves. If the parents are reprobate, it is implied more or less clearly, that their children, capable and incapable, are also reprobate, save as those who are capable are outwardly called by the word and respond in penitence and faith.

Any intelligent reader of the Bible, having no preconceived theory as to the salvation of incapables, would almost certainly infer this general relation. It is not claimed at all that the inference is necessary; only that it is a natural and reasonable one.

Dr. Webb admits that the argument for the salvation of the incapable children of believing parents, based on the Abrahamic Covenant, "is strong and plausible," p. 55; and adds: "but, by implication at least, it suggests that the dead children of unbelievers and pagans are lost," p. 56. Add to this the fact that, as a rule, in this life the incapable children of unbelievers and pagans are placed by God in his word in the same relation to himself as their parents, and the suggestion that they are finally lost becomes stronger. It is noteworthy that Dr. Webb fails to discuss the implications of the destruction of the incapables at the Flood, in Sodom and Gomorrah, on the night of the Exodus, and among the doomed inhabitants of Palestine. Surely these terrible events, involving the observed fate of incapables with that of their parents, suggest inferences quite opposite from our desires for their salvation.

Another just criticism of Doctor Webb's method regards his statement as to the general belief that all incapables are saved, pp. 6-10. In English and in Latin he tells his readers that it is the common opinion, "communis consensus," of the human race, of the church, of individual and eminent saints, of theological systems, that all incapables are saved. Yet he shows near the close of his book,

pp. 299-308, that "Ecumenical Creeds are silent on the subject of infant salvation. The undivided Church made no creedal deliverance of any kind on this topic"; that "the Roman Catholic, the Greek Catholic, and the Lutheran creeds condition the salvation of children upon their having received water-baptism, and some of this group distinctly assert the actual damnation of those infants, idiots, and moral incompetents who pass out of this world, not having received this ecclesiastical ordinance"; that "the Arminian creeds are absolutely silent upon this subject, * * * but everywhere asserting, that actual salvation is invariably conditioned upon conscious faith, repentance and evangelical obedience, which saving acts all infants, idiots and incapables are unable, by the very nature of the case, to perform," p. 308.

This review leaves only the Reformed or Calvinistic creeds, all of which assert or imply that the salvation of all incapables is possible, and some, a few, that it is certain. Dr. Webb could have found in the Old Testament a good deal to warrant the inference that there were some saints of that Dispensation who did not believe that all the incapable children of the reprobate were saved. Where, then, is the foundation for his assertion that the belief in the salvation of all these people is so common, so general, "that there must be some valid exposition which will truly and intelligently justify this cherished belief," pp. 9, 10? In this question is seen the initial vice of his discussion. He starts out with the cherished belief that all incapables are of the number of God's elect people, and, therefore, are to be finally and forever saved. There is no direct, explicit proof. He must find it in good and necessary inference.

An examination of his inferences is reserved for a future article.
Lexington, Missouri.

THANK GOD AND TAKE COURAGE.

After all, the leaves of the book we have closed are not all filled with things unworthy and to be repented of. The old year to any one of us is not to be remembered as altogether bad. The old was not as bad as it is often painted. We were led often in ways we knew not of. We were guided when perplexed. We were helped in times of need. Sometimes we did better than we expected. When we thought the day was evil, we found that God meant it for good. We look over the stained pages of our past story, and we find much to cheer and strengthen us. We thank God and take courage, and turn over the new leaf with a new hope.

Little Soldiers

In your blood are the millions of corpuscles that defend you against disease.

To make and keep these little soldiers healthy and strong, is simply to make and keep the blood of the right quality and quantity.

This is just what Hood's Sarsaparilla does—it helps the little soldiers in your blood to fight disease for you.

It cures scrofula, eczema, eruptions, catarrh, rheumatism, anemia, nervousness, dyspepsia, general debility, and builds up the whole system.